



NEGP MONTHLY

A monthly in-depth look at states and communities and their efforts to reach the National Education Goals
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CODE OF CONDUCT

Improving student achievement is significantly challenged in classrooms where student behavior is so unruly it disrupts instruction and learning. A recent Phi Delta Kappa Poll of "Teachers' Attitudes toward the Public Schools" found that discipline followed behind only the quality of the teaching staff when teachers and the public were asked which factors they think are very or fairly important in choosing a school.

According to the American Federation of Teachers, a clear discipline code with fair and consistently enforced consequences for misbehavior is essential for student learning to occur. Officials in successful states, North Dakota, Oklahoma and Wyoming, underscore the importance of small communities and teacher professional development in classroom management as key.

Overview

Discipline is often noted in surveys of parents as both an important goal and an intransigent problem facing American public schools. A 1994 Gallup survey, commissioned by Phi Delta Kappa, found that along with fighting, gangs and violence, parents see discipline issues as the "biggest problems" facing public schools. Another poll conducted in 1994, *First Things First* (by Public Agenda), also found that "Americans are concerned that too many public schools are so disorderly and undisciplined that learning cannot take place."

While the school shootings, from Columbine High School in Colorado to a first grade in Michigan, dominate the news, these incidents, while horrific, remain few. A more common everyday problem teachers face is students whose behavior is disruptive enough to harm their peers' ability to learn in the classroom. Some educators dismiss the ability of new education proposals to reform the classroom until disruptive students are helped to change their behavior or are removed from the classroom. A



disciplined school environment is the bedrock of student achievement. Daily threats and disruptive behavior, left unchecked, are a deadly cancer that kills the desire to teach and learn.

Goal 7 of the National Education Goals, Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-Free Schools, recognizes that a calm, safe school and classroom are imperative for learning to occur. Indicators of Goal 7 range from monitoring the availability of drugs on school property to student and teacher victimization. However, one indicator tackles the more chronic problems facing schools nationwide – disruptive behavior in the classroom.

This Monthly examines three of the four states – North Dakota, Oklahoma and Wyoming – with the lowest percentages of public secondary school teachers reporting that student disruptions interfere with their teaching. “Connectedness” is a theme that resonates through the voices of education leaders in these states interviewed by the Monthly. Many of the top performing states for Goal 7 are small states, with close-knit communities. While the size of the state and diversity of its population are beyond the control of state and local leaders, the concept of “connectedness” can still apply at the school level in all states. Schools-within-schools and smaller alternative programs for at-risk youth are two ways to reduce the feeling of anonymity that permeates the student body at large, urban and suburban schools.

Thus small, rural states can suggest practices that can be adapted for larger, more urban schools. For example, the trend in high schools toward schools-within-schools and career academies can make a large school feel smaller, where students are more connected to each other and the adults at school. This “connectedness” and sense of community reduce the likelihood of students acting out in a way that disrupts fellow classmates, according to the education officials interviewed for this Monthly.

Connecting with Children

In remarks delivered in the summer of 1998, U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley implored parents and teachers to reconnect with their children. He directed them to a 1997 survey published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that focuses on high-risk and disruptive behavior of youth. The survey revealed that young people who feel connected to their parents and schools were far less likely to engage in high-risk and disruptive behavior. “Kids who feel connected to school are more likely to feel connected at home, and kids who perform better in school are the same ones who are told at home that school is important,” said Robert Blum M.D., the survey director.

School Discipline

A teacher's ability to manage his or her classroom keeps at bay outbreaks of disruptive student behavior. Teacher instruction and student learning are significantly challenged in classrooms where disrespectful and disruptive behavior reigns. Recognizing that effective school discipline “sets the stage” for high standards, the American Federation of Teachers in 1997 created *A Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Learning: Standards of Conduct, Standards for Achievement*, which subsequently was endorsed by school boards, state legislators, city councils, business and community groups and others nationwide. The document is the centerpiece of an AFT campaign for standards of student conduct and high standards of student achievement, called *Responsibility, Respect, Results: Lessons for Life*. The *Bill of Rights* begins:



The National Education Goals Panel

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The traditional mission of our public schools has been to prepare our nation's young people for equal and responsible citizenship and productive adulthood. Today, we reaffirm that mission by remembering that democratic citizenship and productive adulthood begin with standards of conduct and standards for achievement in our schools. Other education reforms may work; high standards of conduct and achievement do work – and nothing else can work without them.

The document continues by listing 10 responsibilities. They include: All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts and schools that have clear discipline codes with fair and consistently enforced consequences for misbehavior, where high grades stand for high achievement and promotion is earned, and have alternative educational placements for violent or chronically disruptive students.

Six essential elements for promoting student conduct and high standards of achievement also were established:

- promote effective classroom management
- enact district-wide discipline codes
- enforce the discipline code
- implement programs to modify low-levels of student misbehavior
- establish alternative placements for chronically disruptive and violent students
- support the work of families, religious institutions and communities in developing sound character in children

Public school secondary teachers in North Dakota, Oklahoma and Wyoming have reported fewer student behavior disruptions in the classroom than their colleagues in other states. In 1994 33% of public secondary school teachers in North Dakota and Montana reported that student disruptions interfered with their teaching, compared to 46% of all public and private school teachers nationally. Thirty nine percent (39%) of teachers in Oklahoma and Wyoming did so. These were the only states performing significantly better than the US average. State officials in the three states reported here concede that their state's rural nature and small, tight-knit communities may have led to their strong showing in this area. However, they also point to opportunities for professional development helping teachers better manage their classrooms and the promotion of healthy school environments for students and staff.



North Dakota

In 1994, North Dakota and Montana were states with the lowest rates (only 33%) of public secondary school teachers reporting that student disruptions interfere with teaching. The national average was 46%.

Linda Johnson, director of health services for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction said the state's smaller schools are a significant reason why fewer students are disruptive in the classroom. According to Johnson, the average high school of grades 9 through 12 enrolls only 109 students. The high adult to student ratio translates into more adult supervision and improves the chances of strong relationships being forged between student and teacher.

Johnson also reports that the state promotes a healthy school culture through a conference held annually for the past 14 years. The North Dakota Roughrider Conference is held every summer, with about 60 to 70 school districts sending teams to participate in the workshops. Each team develops an action plan for making their school a healthier place to work and learn.

The conference "combines personal wellness skills with teacher training to improve school health programs," according to Roughrider material. The goals of the conference are twofold: to underscore the importance of the teacher as the model of behavior and to promote a healthier school environment for students. For example, teachers are reminded that "you can't be a smoker and be a teacher who reminds students not to smoke," explains Johnson. Consequently, many of the workshops at the Roughrider conference focus on "personal wellness" for the teachers, including seminars on Yoga and "Are You in Your Right Mind?"

The conference also focuses upon research-based curricula designed to promote a healthier and safer school environment, notes Johnson. Teachers participate in curriculum training and also have the opportunity to improve their classroom management skills.

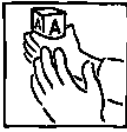
The Department of Public Instruction follows up on each team's action plan by hiring facilitators to follow a school's team throughout the year and write a year-end evaluation of their progress. The Department awards successful schools \$200.

Johnson indicates that the state's strong performance on this indicator is also due to the "good work ethic and respect for adults" that abound throughout North Dakota. "This is true not only in the high school, but out on the street. People here are pretty polite," she said.

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THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS



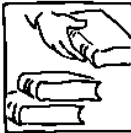
Goal 1: Ready to Learn



Goal 2: School Completion



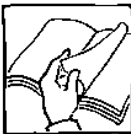
Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship



Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development



Goal 5: Mathematics and Science



Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning



Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-free Schools



Goal 8: Parental Participation

Oklahoma

Only thirty-nine percent (39%) of Oklahoma's public secondary school teachers reported in 1994 that student disruptions interfere with their teaching. Oklahoma ranks among the nation's top-performing states, significantly better than the national average of 46%.

Gayle Robertson Jones, coordinator for Safe and Drug Free Schools for the Oklahoma Department of Education, underscores the importance of small student-to-teacher ratios, where the students "have a chance to build relationships with teachers; where the teachers are not only authority figures, someone to be argumentative with."

However, she also pointed to teacher professional development opportunities that help teachers promote safe, disruption-free learning environments. Gracy Taylor, safe schools coordinator with the Oklahoma City Public Schools, explained that during the late 1980s, the school district began a trainer-of-trainers program, focusing on effective discipline and teaching strategies for teachers to implement in the classroom. Until then, the district's professional development had been a "one-shot, inspirational thing." It was eventually transformed into a structured, long-term program. The discipline and teaching strategies program targeted first-year teachers and separated their workshops from veteran teachers, said Taylor. "We were very fortunate for the input from professors at Oklahoma State, insightful people from the district, and state funds, which helped us organize effective workshops," she said.

Taylor also credited the state for instituting a set of criteria used to evaluate teachers and administrators on classroom management and discipline issues. "The criteria said to us, 'these are important issues,' and that helped motivate the district to develop better professional development models." Professional development funds from the state and district-led initiatives focused on two things: discipline/classroom management and effective teaching techniques, noted Taylor.

Oklahoma continues to stress the need for disciplined schools and well-managed classrooms, according to Johnson. In 1996, state law called for the creation of safe-school committees, with representation of two parents, two teachers and two students. The catalyst for the committees is the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act, she added.

Alternative schools may be the answer for some students who are disruptive in the classroom, said Taylor. "Kids learn in



different ways," she explained. "Some need more structured environments and smaller teacher-student ratios. Many of these schools have a more general air of sharing and are open, not quite so dictatorial." She added "anytime a student learner is engaged in learning, actively participating in the classroom, you will have fewer discipline problems."

"Kids that are challenged, interested and motivated are not going to disrupt the classroom," Taylor concluded.

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Wyoming

Thirty-nine percent of Wyoming's public secondary school teachers reported in 1994 that student disruptions interfere with teaching, placing Wyoming among the highest performing states in the nation. The national average was 46 percent.

State rules and regulations are few in Wyoming, reports Mike Smith, unit director for health and safety at the Wyoming Department of Education. He attributes Wyoming's success in this indicator to the state's long-held tradition of local control and values. "We are a rural state, with small schools in small towns, and that helps our children to be more respectful to teachers," he said.

Carol Mawford, unit director for school improvement programs agreed with Smith's view. Prior to 1994, there were no state programs in effect that Mawford said might have led to Wyoming being a high performer in this indicator. Instead, the state's rural nature and strong sense of community limits classroom disruptions. "When you have small communities with schools that are culturally at the heart of your community, you have local social controls that you don't have in large cities," she said. Secondly, the strong communities give children a "network of people who all care about the kids of their community, so you have a large and broad parental support network for all children," she added.

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RESOURCES

Bureau Of At-Risk Children. 135 Dupont Street. Plainview, New York 11803-0760. (800)99-YOUTH.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Division of Violence Prevention. 4770 Buford Highway NW. Atlanta, Georgia. (770)488-4362. www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/dvp

Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. 1225 Eye Street NW. Suite 1100. Washington, D.C. 20005. (202)289-7319.

Center for the Study of the Prevention of Violence. University of Colorado at Boulder. Boulder, Colorado 90309-04421. (303)492-1032. www.colorado.edu/cspv

Drug Strategies, Inc. 2445 M Street NW. Suite 480. Washington, D.C. 20037. (202)663-6098. www.drugstrategies.com

National Education Goals Panel. 1255 22nd Street NW. Washington, D.C. 20037. (202)724-0015. www.negp.gov

North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence. 20 Enterprise Street. Suite 2. Raleigh, North Carolina. 27607-7375. (800)299-6054. www.ncsu.edu/cpsv

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Programs. U.S. Department of Education. 400 Maryland Avenue SW. Washington, D.C. 20202. www.ed.gov/offices/oese/sdfs

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IN THE LIBRARY

American Federation of Teachers. (1997). "Setting the State for High Standards: Elements of Effective School Discipline." 555 New Jersey Avenue NW. Washington, D.C. 20001-2079. (202)879-4400. www.aft.org

Drug Strategies, Inc. "Safe Schools, Safe Students: A Guide to Violence Prevention Strategies." 2445 M Street NW. Suite 480. Washington, D.C. 20037. (202)663-6098. www.drugstrategies.com

Porter, John W. "Report on Goal Seven Indicating Trends Since 1991, Accomplishments and Suggested Priorities for the Next Decade." (1998). National Education Goals Panel. 1255 22nd Street NW. Washington, D.C. 20037. (202)724-0015. www.negp.gov

U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. (1998). "Annual Report on School Safety, 1998. Safe and Drug-Free Schools Programs Office. U.S. Department of Education. 400 Maryland Avenue SW. Washington, D.C. 20202. www.ed.gov/offices/oese/sdfs.

U.S. Department of Education (1998). "Turning Around Low-Performing Schools." (800)USA-LEARN. www.ed.gov.

**Upcoming Goals Panel Events and Products*****What is the National Education Goals Panel?***

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 by President Bush and the nation's Governors to report state and national progress and urge education improvement efforts to reach a set of National Education Goals.

Who serves on the National Education Goals Panel and how are they chosen?

Eight governors, four state legislators, four members of the U.S. Congress, and two members appointed by the President serve on the Goals Panel. Members are appointed by the leadership of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Senate and House, and the President.

What does the Goals Panel do?

The Goals Panel has been charged to:

- Report state and national progress toward the National Education Goals.
- Work to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments.
- Identify promising and effective reform strategies.
- Recommend actions for state, federal and local governments to take.
- Build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.

The annual Goals Report and other publications of the Panel are available without charge upon request from the Goals Panel or at its web site www.negp.gov. Publications requests can be made by mail, fax, or e-mail, or by Internet.

May 22, 2000

The National Education Goals Panel will launch the first of a series of four public hearings throughout the nation. Through the hearings, the Goals Panel will identify best practices to ensure that all children achieve to higher standards.

The first hearing will be held on May 22 in Los Angeles, hosted by Congressman Matthew Martinez (D-California) and Goals Panel Chairman Governor Tommy Thompson (R-Wisconsin). It will take place at the Alhambra City Council Chambers.

June 1, 2000

The second Goals Panel field hearing will be held in Burlington, Vermont, hosted by U.S. Senator Jim Jeffords (R-Vermont) and Goals Panel Chairman Governor Tommy Thompson (R-Wisconsin).